

## 5. Tyndale and Frith Testify:

[www.CreationismOnline.com](http://www.CreationismOnline.com)

Ethiopia and India Support

WILLIAM TYNDALE (c. 1490-1536), greatest of the English Reformers, eminent linguist, and first translator of the New Testament from Greek into English, was recognized as one of the finest classical scholars of his time. Trained at both Oxford and Cambridge, he was thus linked to both universities.

He entered Oxford, from which he received his B.A. and M.A. degrees, with a yearning for spiritual things and a bent toward languages. There he became a master in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and skilled in Spanish, French, and English. At Oxford he was influenced by John Colet's lectures in New Testament Greek, which broke with tradition and revolutionized Bible study. [1] (Pictured on page 96.)

Tyndale then went on to Cambridge in 1516. There Tyndale, Frith, and Bilney all studied the Scripture-revealed provisions of regeneration. And there the Book spoke to Tyndale's heart, and he found God in its pages. It was a time of new beginnings, when his inward convictions began to find outward expression. Groups of students gathered to read the Greek and Latin Gospels of Erasmus. Having taken priest's orders in 1521, Tyndale became tutor-chaplain to Sir John and Lady Walsh, of Old Sodbury. There he preached to eager listeners who filled the sanctuary, also in surrounding villages and towns, and at Bristol on the college green. His preaching stirred great interest, but the hostility of the priests was aroused and numerous disputes resulted in which Tyndale used the Greek text with telling effect.

*1 Edward Irving Carlyle, "William Tyndale," The Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 19, p. 1351.*

He was soon denounced by priests and dignitaries. Quickly the storm broke into the open, and a real struggle was on. The chancellor convoked a conference of the clergy, and Tyndale was severely reprimanded for his growing "heresies." The crisis had come. His course was clear, as arrest and condemnation faced him. He must seek asylum on the Continent.

Rome was then at the pinnacle of its power in Britain, and a pall of midnight darkness, corruption, and superstition covered the land. This Tyndale felt had been brought about by taking away the Key of Knowledge—the Holy Word. There was only one hope for Britain and the world, and that was to restore the Key. Distressed by the ignorance of the priests and monks, he determined to provide the remedy by translating the New Testament into the English vernacular, thus lighting a torch in the midst of the spiritual darkness. From thenceforth he made this noble resolve his life mission. He rebelled against the common concept that the pope's laws were above God's, and declared that if God spared his life, before many years he would "cause a boy that drives the plow" to know more of Scripture than the monks and priests that swarmed the land.

He began his task. But no place was open locally for translation work, so he moved to London. He had hoped for assistance from other scholars, particularly from the bishop of London. But the bishop refused, as did Sir Thomas More, the chancellor. Then a wealthy cloth merchant of London opened his home to him for a year and a half. Tyndale also began to champion many of Luther's positions, and Tyndale's friendship with John Frith deepened. But his increasing sympathy with the teachings of Continental Reformers made further stay in England hazardous. So, because of priestly opposition, he sought asylum in Germany, never to see his native land again.

Arriving in Hamburg, he unpacked his precious Greek text and resumed his task. Later he went to Cologne, where he began to print the Gospels of Matthew and Mark first.

Interruptions forced him to complete the task at Worms, where Luther made his brilliant defence before the Diet, and then at Antwerp. For twelve years he was hounded and hunted.

Forbidden in one city, he fled to another—Wittenberg, Cologne, Hamburg, Worms, Strasbourg, Marburg, and Antwerp—to evade his oppressors. In 1524 he reached Wittenberg in Saxony, where the Reformation had made great progress. There he met Luther and was inspired by his strong faith and dynamic action. Under such environment he joyfully entered upon the completion of his great task. His translation was ready within a year.

Again, a London merchant furnished the funds to secure a printer, and six thousand copies were struck off. But an interdict was issued to prevent copies from entering Britain under pain of excommunication. Although the English ports were guarded, thousands of copies were smuggled into England, concealed in bales and boxes of merchandise, and were quickly circulated everywhere. Church officials seized and burned many, and the bishop of London and Sir Thomas More fought and exposed the

translation. But Tyndale brought out a revised edition, and there were seven more printings in the next ten years, all speedily sold. Cardinal Wolsey, who had sought to prevent copies from entering England, ordered Luther's and Tyndale's books burned. And a great bonfire, kindled outside St. Paul's, consumed all the Tyndale Testaments that could be gathered up. [2] But other editions replaced those that were burned, and many were sold on the Continent, as well.

Common errors were corrected. But the bishops were incensed, for Tyndale had used "repentance" for "penance," "acknowledge" for "confess," "image" for "idol," "congregation" for "church," and "love" for "charity"—basing his translation on Erasmus' Greek text and borrowing from Luther's arrangement. Wyclif's Bible was largely obsolete and inaccessible, and had been taken from the faulty Latin Vulgate. Tyndale's was a simple, honest, straightforward translation, shunning the ornate, euphemistic style of the times. The Bible was now available to all and exerted a powerful influence on the English Reformation, as well as setting the pattern upon which most later revisers worked. Indeed, 90 per cent of the Authorized Version of 1611 is attributable to Tyndale. His great learning had been made to serve a great cause. He is thus rightfully established among the literary immortals of England — his style characterized by tenderness, simplicity, and grandeur of phrasing. Indeed, the persistence of Tyndale's work has been called the "miracle of English letters." In 1528 Tyndale wrote on justification by faith, under the Parable of the Wicked Mammon, with several editions following. With him there was one uniform principle — the infallible authority of Holy Scripture as the rule of faith and practice and the test of all teaching. This he set forth in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in which he sought to restore Holy Scripture to its proper place in the hearts of men, holding that the true sense of the Bible — contrary to the scholastic emphasis of the day — is its literal meaning. His view was therefore much more in accord with the view of our day than with that of his own time. Thus the two great principles of the Reformation were brought sharply to the forefront. So while Luther hands opened a closed Bible in Germany, Tyndale had done the same for Britain. And his *The Practice of Prelates* was an unsparing indictment of the Roman hierarchy.

***2 The only surviving copy of the treasured first octavo edition (Worms: Schoeffer) is housed in a vault in the Bristol Baptist College, England, oldest Baptist institution in the world, founded in 1679.***

In 1529 Tyndale repaired to the Low Countries to translate the Pentateuch. In this he was assisted by Miles Coverdale, who virtually completed the translation. By this time Tyndale had rejected both Catholicism's transubstantiation and Lutherans consubstantiation, regarding the celebration of the Lord's Supper as purely commemorative and symbolic. Beginning in 1527, Tyndale crossed swords with Sir Thomas More, [3] and a literary war followed. Back and forth the battle surged. In 1529 More produced his *Dialogue of Sir Thomas More*, attacking the positions of Luther and Tyndale, and defending Rome. This dealt with the doctrines that divided Christendom—Tyndale championing the Scripture, and More, the church. This Tyndale answered in 1531 with satiric force.

More soon issued *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answers*. The exchange became the classic controversy of the English Reformation. (More pictured on page 96.)

The bishops had burned Tyndale's books. Now they resolved that he too must burn at the stake. This Tyndale had anticipated. Meantime, Cromwell had become privy councillor, and Tyndale was invited to return to England from the Continent, under safe-conduct. But this he felt to be unsafe because of high ecclesiastical resentment. Then Henry VIII turned against him, denounced his writings, and sought to bring him to trial. He asked Charles V to deliver him, but the emperor refused to do so.

Tyndale had found refuge in the home of an English merchant in Antwerp, and thought he was safe. But he was lured from home by an English acquaintance, actually an agent for his enemies in England. Decoyed into another jurisdiction, he was seized by the authorities of Brussels in the name of the emperor, and conveyed to the castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels.

Here, under arrest, he languished in prison for about seventeen months through a protracted trial for heresy. Finally, on October 6, 1536, he was taken outside the castle to suffer death at Brussels, in Flanders. Fastened to a stake, he was strangled by the executioner, who then burned his body.

***3 SIR THOMAS MORE (1478-1535), humanist, statesman, and Lord Chancellor of England, first planned to become a monk, and early entered the service of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But he entered Oxford in 1497S studying the classics and law. Gaining eminence at the bar, he entered Parliament in 1504, his home becoming a rendezvous for the intellectuals, such as Erasmus. He became a favourite of Henry VIII, and in 1521 he was made treasurer of the Exchequer and was knighted. By 1523 he was made speaker of the House of Commons and high steward of the University of Cambridge. He defended the Papacy against Luther, and in the same year began to write tracts against him. The Reformation forced the humanists to choose sides. More championed the dogmas of the Roman Church, and he was a militant Immortal-Soulist. In 1529, upon the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, he was appointed Lord Chancellor. He persecuted Protestants, but none were put to death under him for their pestilent dogmas. In 1532 More retired from public life because he refused to sanction Henry's divorce proceedings, ecclesiastical policies, and renunciation of the pope. In 1534 More was committed to the Tower, imprisoned a year, pronounced guilty of treason, and beheaded in 1535. But he was beatified by Leo XIII in 1886 and canonized by Pius XI in 1935.***

He had expected just that, and his last words were the prayer. "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England." Significantly enough, the very next year the public reading of the Word of God was authorized by royal decree. And five years later a Bible, allegedly translated by various "learned men," reached the desk of Henry VIII, who ordered that every church in the kingdom be provided with a copy. Tyndale had triumphed. He had left England an unknown exile, and had lived abroad in poverty, obscurity, and danger; yet before his death his name had become a household word in England and was widely known on the Continent. And the Bible had become known in the common tongue of the people. Truth was established.

### **I. Clear-cut Stand on the Sleep of the Soul**

#### **1. PROPHETIC DEPICTION OF PAPAL PERVERSIONS.**

Tyndale was a keen student of prophecy, holding the pope to be the Antichrist depicted in Revelation 13 and 17, in Daniel 7 and 8, and in the Epistles of Paul. The Antichrist had perverted the gospel and changed the ordinances of God, [4] and perverted Bible truth on the nature of man. Somewhere, sometime, Tyndale had fallen under the spell of Luther's lofty scorn of the papal decretals on natural immortality and Purgatory and the attendant impostures and excesses of the day, [5] and had come to similar conclusions.

It is significant that the two men—Luther and Tyndale—who spearheaded the Reformation in Germany and in England by translating the Bible into the vernacular of their respective peoples, should both be thus led to detect this distinctive Roman departure on the nature of man and the sleep of the soul, along with related Catholic innovations, both going on record against the Platonic philosophy that had established itself in Roman theology.

*4 See Froom, Prophetic Faith, vol. 2, pp. 355-358.*

*5 See under Luther, pp. 65-79.*

#### **2. DEPARTED SOULS NOT IN HEAVEN, HELL, OR PURGATORY.**

Sir Thomas More, it will be recalled, had objected to Luther's doctrine that "all souls die and sleep till dooms-day," and strongly objected to the "pestilential sect" represented by Luther and Tyndale. If such had not been Luther's teaching, Tyndale would surely have denied it. But instead, Tyndale, in his Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, rose to its vigorous defence as the doctrine not only of Luther but of the Bible. Here is the record:

"And ye, in putting them [departed souls] in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. What God doth with them, that shall we know when we come to them. The true faith puts the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joined the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly-minded pope consented unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupted the scripture to stablish it. And again, if the souls hie in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?" [6]

#### **3. INNATE IMMORTALITY FROM PAGANISM AND POPERY.**

This clearly shows that Tyndale did not believe that souls go to heaven at death, but that they sleep till the resurrection. He argues logically that the opposite doctrine destroys the resurrection. He also agrees with Luther, and goes to the heart of the issue in asserting that the Innate Immortality of the soul is a papal doctrine borrowed from "heathen philosophers." Tyndale then quotes More as saying chidingly:

"What shall he care how long he live in sin, that believeth Luther, that he shall after this life feel neither good nor evil, in body nor soul, until the day of doom?" [7] To this Tyndale answers pointedly: "Christ and his apostles taught no other; but warned to look for Christ's coming again every hour: which coming again because ye believe will never be, therefore ye have feigned that other merchandise." [8]

*6 William Tyndale, An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, book 4, chap. 2, pp. 180, 181. See also Tyndale's Works, p. 324.*

*7 Ibid., chap. 8, pp. 188, 189.*

#### **4. "SAINTS IN HEAVEN" DESTROYS RESURRECTION ARGUMENT.**

Tyndale not only denied Purgatory but held that neither the Virgin nor the saints were able to intercede for humankind. He insisted that doctrine should be established on Holy Scripture alone, not on human tradition. Thus, in meeting More's contention that we should pray to the saints who are alive in heaven and can help, Tyndale makes the charge that such a doctrine contradicts the explicit teaching of Christ:

"And when he [More] proves that the saints be in heaven in glory with Christ already, saying, 'If God be their God, they be in heaven, for he is not the God of the dead;' there he steals away Christ's argument, where with he proves the resurrection: that Abraham and all saints should rise again, and not that their souls were in heaven; which doctrine was not yet in the world. And with that doctrine he taketh away the resurrection quite, and makes Christ's argument of none effect. For when Christ alleges the scripture, that God is Abraham's God, and added to, that God is not God of the dead but of the living, and so proves that Abraham must rise again. I deny Christ's argument, and I say with M. More, that Abraham is yet alive not because of the resurrection, but because his soul is in heaven." [9]

#### 5. DOES "MASTER MORE" KNOW MORE THAN PAUL?

Tyndale presses his contention still further by showing the conflict of papal teaching with that of St. Paul, phrasing it in somewhat sarcastic vein:

"And in like manner, Paul's argument unto the Corinthians is nought worth: for when he saith, 'If there be no resurrection, we be of all wretches the miserable; here we have no pleasure, but sorrow, care, and oppression; and therefore, if we rise not again, all our suffering is in vain.' 'Nay, Paul, thou art unlearned; go to Master More, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.' And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wished it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, shew me what cause should be of the resurrection?" [10]

*8 Ibid., p. 189.*

*9 Ibid., book 2, chap. 8, p. 118.*

*10 Ibid.*

Such was the clear witness of the first English Reformer upon the nature of man.

### **II. Frith—Martyrdom for Denial of Consciousness in Purgatory**

-It is important that we understand the character, calibre, and competence of those who have held to, and particularly those who have pioneered in the rediscovery and revival of, the teaching of Conditional Immortality in any given country or period of time. It is essential to know whether they were learned or ignorant, trained or untrained, balanced or erratic, pious or brazen, principled or unprincipled, competent or incompetent in the Bible and Biblical languages, whether they were independent thinkers or mere reflectors of the opinions of others, and especially whether they held to the Word of God as the source of all truth and the arbiter for every doctrinal difference.

Thus at the very outset of the English Reformation and the break with Rome. Conditional Immortality was brought to the forefront by two scholarly Bible translators who followed their convictions to the stake and died for their faith. Because of his importance in our quest we give a companion sketch of John Frith, worthy cochampion of Conditionalism in those crucial years of emerging British Protestantism.

The associate pioneer in this field, JOHN FRITH, or FRYTH (1503-1533), was a brilliant young English Reformer and martyr, and Tyndale's "son in the faith." After leaving Eton, he was highly trained at Cambridge, where Stephen Gardiner, later bishop of Winchester, was his special tutor. Frith was a rising star, unsurpassed in his day for learning. He received his B.A. in 1525 from King's College, where he specialized in Latin and Greek. He then responded to an invitation extended by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey to him and to certain other bright prospects, and transferred his residence to Wolsey's newly founded Cardinal College, Oxford (later Christ Church). Here he taught, and became a junior canon. [11] Here Frith probably met William Tyndale, from whom he received "the seed of the gospel" into his heart, and later assisted him in the translation and publication of the New Testament. Both Wolsey and Henry VIII had ambitious plans for him, but he turned away from them all for the gospel's sake.

His intensive study of the Word in his translation work wrought a tremendous change in his concepts. And because of his zeal in Reformed preaching, he was soon charged with championing Luther's heresies. This led to his arrest and several months of imprisonment in a foul dungeon, actually a fish cellar, at Oxford. Several others were likewise held under duress, from among whom at least three died from the ordeal.

Upon the consent of Wolsey, Frith was released in 1528, with the supposition that he would remain at Oxford. But he fled to the Continent for safety, where for a time he resided in the newly founded Protestant University of Marburg, Germany.

Here he associated with Tyndale in translation work. While at Marburg he made the acquaintance of several other scholars and Reformers of note who confirmed his growing Protestant convictions. Later, both he and Tyndale went to Antwerp, where the New Testament was completed and work was begun on the Old Testament.

**11 A. C. Bickley, "John Frith," *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 7, pp. 719. 720; C. H. A. Bulkley, *Martyrs of the Reformation*, pp. 109-142; *The Works of the English Reformers William Tyndale, and John Frith* (Thomas Russell, ed.), vol. 3, pp. 190-193, 450-455; Mills, *Earlier Life-Truth Exponents*, pp. 9, 10.**

During this time, although suffering from poverty and undernourishment, Frith wrote *A Disputation of Purgatory*, Divided in to three books. The first book was an answer to John Rastell, the second to Sir Thomas More, and the third to John Fisher, bishop of Rochester. [12] This triple reply was occasioned by two books: One was *The Supplication of Souls in Purgatory*, made by Sir Thomas More, Knight, printed in 1529. The other was *A New Book of Purgatory Divided in to three dialogues*. The first dialogue the immortality of man's soul. The third dialogue treats of Purgatory—this last issued in 1530, being by Rastell, brother-in-law of More. In his reply Frith uses what became the standard, well-reasoned Conditionalist arguments against Purgatory, such as the mortal nature of man, the resurrection as the sole hope for a future life only in Christ. And Frith's reply became one of the factors that ultimately cost him his life.

Frith received word from the king that he would be welcomed back to England if he would renounce his heresies. He had been abroad for several years and had a great desire to return and preach the gospel he had found in the Scriptures. Returning to England in 1532 in penury, Frith began preaching.

But he was so disreputable in appearance that he was soon arrested as a vagabond and put in the stocks. He refused to give his name, so food was withheld to force him to disclose his identity. As the town schoolmaster conversed with him in Latin and Greek, his identity was discovered and he was released. After wandering from place to place he was again arrested. This time he was charged with heresy upon order of Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England.

**12 It is printed without printer's name, date, or place, but it is believed to have been printed at Marburg in 1531, and reprinted in London in 1533.**

Both Vicar General Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer favoured leniency, but the circulation of a manuscript (*Lytle Treatise on the Sacraments*) written by Frith at the request of a friend but not intended for circulation aggravated the hostility of his enemies. [13] Tyndale was greatly concerned over his plight, for he looked up to Frith as the rising star and the great hope of the church in England. He counselled Frith to avoid a clash with the authorities, but admonished him to be faithful.

Nothing could now save him. He was accordingly tried before a court of six, of whom Cranmer (who was himself greatly troubled) was one, and found guilty of denying both Purgatory, with its involvements, and transubstantiation as necessary articles of faith. He was condemned to the stocks and plagued with hunger to break his spirit. He was offered an opportunity to escape if he would compromise, but he refused to reverse his views. The decrees and appeals of men carried no weight with him in a matter of conviction. He knew that the Scriptures of truth supported him and were the final source and standard of authority. And he must face God for his convictions.

During his imprisonment in the Tower, though-loaded with chains, he wrote several tracts confuting various charges and winning Rastell, as well as producing his major controversial work, *A Book Made by John Fryth, prisoner in the Tower of London answering to M. More's Letter* (1533).

Frith, it should be stated, was the first to take the position regarding the symbolic character of the sacraments, later incorporated into the English communion.

Frith's trial took place in Lambeth Palace, before the Archbishop of Canterbury, with Bishop Gardiner of Winchester (Frith's former tutor) now testifying against him. The articles against him were read and acknowledged. He was then sentenced by the bishop of London to be burned at the stake, and was turned over to the secular arm. Pending his burning, he was committed to Newgate Prison. There he was put into a dungeon, laden with chains, his neck circled with an iron collar fastened to a post. It was impossible for him either to lie down or to stand upright. But despite this cruel posture he continued by day and night to write by candlelight.

**13 Frith was betrayed by William Holt, who under the pretence of friendship drew out his views on the sacraments, asking Frith to put them in writing for study. Holt then took the manuscript to More, successor to Wolsey, who had Frith committed to the Tower.**

Finally, on July 4, 1533, praying that his death might open the eyes of the king, Frith was burned at the stake in Smithfield, just outside of London. Here he reaffirmed his faith, and when the fagots were fired, he embraced them in his arms and committed his



spirit to God. The spectators were greatly moved, but the pastor of All Souls Church admonished the people who had gathered not to pray for him any more than for a dog. Frith only besought God to forgive them. So he sealed his life with his blood at the age of thirty.

Twenty-three years after the martyrdom of Frith, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who had been one of his judges, went to the stake for the same belief. And soon thereafter it became the publicly professed faith of the English nation. [14] Frith's writings exerted a pronounced and lasting influence. To him the church embraced all true members of Christ in every land and communion. Moreover, he believed the church to be the depository of all truth and responsible for its dissemination to the whole world—the embryo of the modern missionary idea. He was also a student of prophecy and wrote effectively on the papal Antichrist.

### **III. Twin Causes of Frith's Death by Fire**

It was but natural that Frith, as the close literary associate of Tyndale, should jointly share Tyndale's view—that immortality begins only at the resurrection, at the last day, and that none of the dead are as yet either in Heaven or in Hell. Times were tense and persecution rife. It was England's transition hour, with Protestantism in the making, and Frith was a spokesman in the age of Protestant heroics and separation from things papal. He saw more clearly than most in his day that such a break could not be fully effective unless and until the dogma of Purgatory and the concept of immediate conscious rewards at death were abandoned as un-Biblical and untrue.

#### ***14 Deborah Alcock, "John Frith," in Six Heroic Men.***

That became his unyielding position, and one of the twin causes of his martyrdom.

#### **1. PARABLE IS BASIS OF BISHOP'S CONTENTION.**

In his "Answer unto My Lord [Bishop Fisher] of Rochester," Frith steadfastly affirmed that the "word [of God] is the judge," that it is "the perfect touchstone that tries all things"—the true Protestant position. On the bishop's contention that "of the souls that are departed, some are already damned in hell, and some are already in heaven," Frith states that "to prove this true, he [Fisher] alleged the parable of the rich man (Luke 16)." That was the bishop's chief evidence and argument.

But Frith's rejoinder was: "I am sure my Lord [the bishop of Rochester] is not so ignorant as to say that a parable proves anything." Parables only "open and expound dark and hard things." Rather, Frith contends, "we must consider the thing wherefore they be spoken, and apply them only to that they are spoken for." [15]

#### **2. CONSCIOUS TORMENT DESTROYS RESURRECTION ARGUMENT.**

Frith then says pointedly that from "this parable" they "should have no such apparitions of the dead," and that they would not believe "although one of the dead should rise again and tell it them." Then for the sake of argument he says:

"Notwithstanding, let me grant in him [the bishop], that some are already in hell, and some in heaven, (which thing he shall never be able to prove by the Scripture, yea, and which plainly destroyed the resurrection, and taketh away the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul do prove that we shall rise) yet, I say, let me grant it him, to see how he will conclude." [16] And this is what the bishop had contended: " 'Neither it is creditable,' (saith he) 'that all which are cast into hell should straightway go to heaven, therefore must we put a purgatory, where they may be purged.' "

#### ***15 Works of English Reformers, vol. 3, pp. 190, 191.***

#### ***16 Ibid., pp. 191, 192. In this Frith concurs with Tyndale.***

#### **3. RIGHTEOUS REST IN PEACE, NOT IN TORMENT.**

To this Frith answers, "All that live are faithful or unfaithful." And then he declares concerning the faithful that "the righteous man, when he dies, shall rest in peace." This he repeats and amplifies: "Every faithful man shall rest in peace and not be tormented in the pains of purgatory." Then he observes frankly, "And as touching this point, where they rest, I dare be bold to say that they are in the hand of God, and that God would that we should be ignorant where they be, and not to take upon us to determine the matter." [17]

#### **4. ABRAHAM'S BOSOM IS ABRAHAM'S FAITH.**

Touching next upon the meaning, in the parable, of "Abraham's bosom" whereon Lazarus rested, Frith answers explicitly, "Abraham's bosom were nothing else than Abraham's faith." Then he observes:

"He that departed in this faith rests in peace, and waited for the last day, when God shall give unto his faithful, that is, to his elect, (for only are the elect faithful, and the faithful elect) the crown of his glory, which he hath prepared for them that love him. This crown, doth Paul say, that he shall receive it in that day. (2 Tim. 4) that is, in the day of judgment. And in the mean season God

hath so provided for us, that they shall wait until the number of their brethren which daily suffer and shall suffer for Christ, be wholly fulfilled, and so shall they not be made perfect without us (Heb. 11)" [18]

So, Frith concludes, this is "a clear case." And he repeats, "Of this he can prove no purgatory," for "there is no man so mad as to say that to rest in peace should signify to lie in the pains of purgatory." Consequently he draws the conclusion, "There is no such purgatory." Of this he was assured, for God will forgive us in Christ "without broiling on the coals in purgatory." [19]

*17 Ibid., p. 192.*

*18 Ibid.*

*19 Ibid., p. 193.*

#### 5. DENIAL OF PURGATORY BECOMES DEATH WARRANT.

In his last letter, entitled "The Articles wherefore John Frith Died," penned and signed on June 23, 1533—just ten days before his martyrdom—Frith states, "They examined me but of two articles." The first was, "Whether I thought there were no purgatory to purge the soul after this present life." To this Frith records his explicit answer: "I said that I thought there was none, for man is made but of two parts, the body and the soul," the soul being "purged by the word of God, which we receive through faith, unto the health and salvation both of body and soul." Therefore he declared, "I must deny the Pope's purgatory." [20] The second charge concerned the sacrament, whether it contained Christ's "very natural body, both flesh and blood."

To this Frith also returned answer, "No, said I, I do not so think." He categorically denied the claim of "transmutation" because, he said, "it is false, and can neither be proved by Scripture, nor faithful doctors." And then he repeated the truism that it "cannot be proved true by Scripture" [21]—the standard by which he tested all teachings. These denials were his death warrant. Such was the testimony of Frith the martyr.

### IV. Continuous Ethiopian Witness for Thousand Years

Before continuing with the Reformation witnesses, let us now turn briefly from Britain and the Continent long enough to examine a highly significant independent line of testimony— first from African Ethiopia and then from the Malabar Coast on the southwestern tip of India. While these far-flung regions are only remotely related to the territory we have been surveying, they are highly significant, because they introduce a second paralleling line of witness for Conditionalism, which reaches back to the early centuries of the Christian Era.

This testimony is unique because it represents the perpetuation of the original Early Church Conditionalism in these remote regions, rather than the recovery of the primitive view— important as that is—as was the case with Luther and Tyndale and other European Reformers who once held, and then repudiated, the Roman dogma of the Innate Immortality of the soul, and its corollary concepts of the endless torment of the wicked, and of Purgatory. Because of its bearing on the case for Conditionalism, let us go back to the beginning of Christianity in Ethiopia.

*20 Ibid., p. 450.*

*21 Ibid., pp. 451, 455.*

#### 1. FRUMENTIUS BECOMES BISHOP OF ABYSSINIA.

FRUMENTIUS (c. 300-c. 360), recognized apostle of Christianity in the Abyssinian (or Ethiopian) Church, was born in Tyre. When still comparatively young, he and a companion went with his uncle, Meropius, a Greek philosopher of Tyre, to the coast of Abyssinia on a voyage of scientific discovery. Landing on the coast for water, they were captured and made slaves by the Abyssinians. Winning the confidence of the king, and in time set free, Frumentius became the private secretary and tutor of the young Prince Aizanes, and attained influence in state affairs.

Carrying on successful missionary work, he developed a church of native converts and Christian merchants. Then, after the prince attained his majority, Frumentius returned to Alexandria to report to Bishop Athanasius, rehearsing the progress he had made in preparing the way for Christianity in Abyssinia.

About 326 Frumentius was consecrated by Athanasius as bishop of Axum (or Axuma), chief city of Abyssinia. He received the title Abuna (patriarch), which designation was hence forth assumed by the leaders of the Abyssinian Church. After his return to Ethiopia, Frumentius baptized the young king.

And his continuing missionary labours were rewarded with extraordinary success. Like Athanasius, Frumentius was a strong opponent of Arianism. [22] And it was obviously he who taught the Conditionalist view concerning man to the Ethiopians, which teaching was still retained by many in the sixteenth century.

22 See Rufinus i.9; Socrates i.19; Sozomen ii.24; Theodoret i.22; and Athanasius, "Defense Against the Arians," 29-31.

It should be added that after Athanasius was banished from Alexandria in 356, Emperor Constantius persecuted the followers of Athanasius, even into remote regions. Pursuant to this policy, Constantius even demanded that the princes of Ethiopia send Frumentius to Alexandria for examination as to his orthodoxy, and the regularity of his ordination. But the princes refused, and Frumentius continued his work and witness in Ethiopia until his death.

## 2. JESUIT MISSIONARIES DISCOVER DISSENTING BELIEF.

When Portuguese Jesuit missionaries reached Ethiopia, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, they found many of these Ethiopian Christians still holding that the dead remain unconscious until the resurrection, as well as some who were still observing the ancient seventh-day Sabbath as a Christian institution. P. Pero Pais, S.J., in his *Historia da Ethiopia*, reports subsequent disputations with the principal local scholars in the presence of Emperor Za Denguil, which took place in June, 1604. Pais specifically records that "they [the Ethiopians] deny purgatory," with its characteristic involvements. And he reports that they answered the usual Catholic contentions by stating that they considered such arguments absurd and unsatisfying. [23] Contending that the Ethiopians were holding three errors as regards souls, Pais said that the third error is their belief that the souls of the saints "are in the earthly Paradise, without enjoying the glory, and they are to, wait there until the day of judgment, when they are going to unite with their bodies, and will enter into heaven together." And concerning the wicked, he stated that they believe that the souls of such are not yet in hell and further, that "they are not to be tormented until they unite with their bodies." This, asserted Jesuit Pais, was a general belief, which he, of course, labelled an "error" [24] because it is in mortal conflict with Catholic dogma.

This Jesuit emissary then sought through public disputations and private talks to prove the Roman Catholic contention that immediately upon death the souls of the saints "enter into heaven and enjoy the glory that their works deserve." And further, that "the souls of those that die in mortal sin go immediately to hell, where they are tormented." Some Ethiopic listeners, he adds, accepted the Catholic teaching, while some "remain in their error," as he termed it. And Pais expressly contradicted the contention of Fr. Luiz de Urreta to the effect that the Ethiopians do not hold such "errors."

23 P. Pero Pais, S.J., *Historia da Ethiopia*, vol. 2, p. 54.

24 *Ibid.*

Still another Jesuit witness is P. Manuel de Almeida, who, in his *Historia de Ethiopia a Alta*, concurs in attesting the antiquity of the Ethiopic belief that "the souls of the wicked that die in mortal sin, do not go immediately to Hell," but instead are detained "without suffering any torment until the day of judgment." And, confirming the statement of Pais, he adds that "they did not believe in Purgatory" nor in "indulgences." More important than this, "they believed that the wicked are not to be in hell eternally." [25] This last point is highly significant, for it is distinctly the Conditionalist position, retained from early times. And in sustaining their view, Pais says, these Ethiopians quote Hebrews 11, that none of the saints enter into glory until the resurrection.

Such explicit attestations from the Jesuits of opposite belief, constitute convincing evidence of the retention in the heart of Africa in the early seventeenth century of the ancient Conditionalist belief on the nature of man. And we repeat:

Theirs was not a revival and restoration of a primitive belief by those who had formerly held the contrary Catholic position.

It was, instead, the retention of a belief held from early times, independent of the innovations that had come virtually to dominate the various European Christian bodies during the Middle Ages. Such a distinction and witness is indeed illuminative in our quest of the far-flung witnesses to Conditionalism.

25 P. Manuel de Almeida, *Historia de Ethiopia a Alta*, lib. 6, pp. 129, 131.

## V. Origin and Witness of Malabar St. Thomas Christians

### 1. RISE AND SPREAD OF THE NESTORIAN MOVEMENT.

It is again essential first to get the historical background of Conditionalism on the great Asian continent. Nestorius, presbyter of the church at Antioch, was made bishop of Constantinople in 428. He denounced errors that had already crept into the church—especially the offensive term "mother of God," as applied to Mary, which title he declared to be a pagan invention. His fiercest antagonist was Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, who was a violent polemicist. Nestorius held that the two natures of Christ remained distinct, but were closely joined and harmonious. He held that Christ possessed two distinct personalities. So there were sharp differences.



After correspondence between the two patriarchs both parties agreed to lay their views before the influential Celestine I, bishop of Rome. As a result, in 430 a Roman synod condemned Nestorius' views, and he was commanded to recant on pain of excommunication. Then came the General Council of Ephesus, in 431, when Cyril and the Alexandrian party again triumphed over Nestorius, who was permitted to retire to a cloister. Thus it was that Cyril gained the imperial support for his views.

## 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NESTORIAN MOVEMENT.

As noted, Nestorianism as a movement rose in the fifth century. And despite deterrents it spread into Persia, Armenia, Syria, India, and even China. The Nestorians became known as the Protestants of Eastern Christianity, having always opposed any doctrine that regarded Mary as more than a woman, and in other respects advocated and preserved numerous early doctrines and usages of the primitive church. They claimed that their sect went back before Nestorius, to the apostle Thomas, many calling themselves "Thomas Christians." Their teachers, having been driven from Edessa, settled at Nisibis, which then became the centre of their vast missionary enterprise. They also produced numerous theologians and philosophers.

After the Council of Ephesus in 431 the Nestorians obtained possession of the theological schools of Edessa, Nisibis, and Seleucia. Then, driven by imperial edict into Persia, they firmly established themselves there, later spreading to India, Bactria (in Afghanistan), and even as far away as China. The group in South India had continued on ever since the period of the early migrations, and were commonly known as Syrian Christians, or St. Thomas Christians. Thus it was that when the emperor expelled the Nestorians from the Roman Empire they spread all over the East as a new and independent sect.

Nevertheless, papal emissaries ever sought to subject them to the pope, sometimes by cunning and sometimes by violence.

## 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF MALABAR ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS.

The St. Thomas Christians of Malabar were, accordingly, a body of Syrian Christians of Nestorian descent, dwelling in the interior of Malabar and Travancore, in southwestern Hindu stan. They retained the Syriac language, held the validity of but two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—and were governed by bishops under a metropolitan. They rejected the authority of Peter and neither invoked saints nor worshiped images. And they were subjected to intense persecution as the Inquisition was established at Goa.

Another remnant of these St. Thomas Christians was found by Dr. Claudius Buchanan, in 1807, near Travancore. He found that their church services were still conducted in Syriac, and that they disclaimed the heresies of Arius, Sabellius, Macedonius, Maianus, Julianus, and Nestorius. They allowed three sacraments—baptism, orders, and the Eucharist. But what is more significant, they believed that the souls of the dead do not see God until the judgment day. Let us note this in greater detail.

### **VI. Malabar Coast Witness—Dead Rest Until Judgment**

As noted, this second group of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries found among descendants of the ancient Nestorians in the Malabar communities beliefs similar to those in Ethiopia concerning the nature of man. In addition, they possessed complete copies of the Syrian Scriptures. The Roman Catholic testimony concerning this group was written by Fr. Joao dos - Santos, O.P., and is found in Ethiopia Oriental, but deals with Asian as well as African countries. [26] It was published in 1609.

Their beliefs are likewise recorded in Journado do Arcebispo de Goa D. Fr. Aleixo de Menezes (1606). There it is further recorded that at the Synod at Diamper in 1599, [27] a sizable number of these St. Thomas Christians defected, under pressure, to the Catholic Church, surrendered their Nestorian views and espoused the opposite Roman Catholic beliefs. This involved a right about-face on the nature of man.

## 1. JESUIT RECORD OF MALABAR CONDITIONALISM.

According to the Jesuit Dr. Joao dos Santos they had steadfastly denied the immaculate conception, refused the worship of images, and did not invoke the saints. But what is far more significant is the fact that they believed that at death the righteous "did not see God" nor "enjoy His glory until at the last universal judgment." And they held, furthermore, that "the wicked that, died in their sins, did not go immediately to hell." Instead, they were held in darkness "until the day of the judgment, in which day all the wicked were to go to Hell together." [28] Here again, then, in this faraway region, we find independent persistence of early Conditionalist beliefs retained by this group from Early Church times. Unquestionably it was another branch in the widespread stream of Conditionalism.

## 2. PROTESTANT RECORD CONFIRMS CONDITIONALIST BELIEFS.

The Protestant record is provided by Michael Geddes, Angli can chancellor of the Cathedral church at Sarum. In his history of the region he says that the Church of Malabar expressly affirmed the Church of Rome to be "fallen from the true faith."

In the dedication he states his design in publishing, namely: "To satisfy the World, That there has always been a considerable visible Church on Earth, that never believed the doctrines of the Pope's Supremacy, Purgatory, Transubstantiation," et cetera. And the title page adds, "agreeing with the Church of England, in opposition to that of Rome."

26 *The only known copy is in the National Library of Lisbon.*

27 *"Diocesan Synod of the Church and Bishopric of Angamale of the Ancient Christians of Saint Tome das Serras do Malabar of East India, held by Rev. Monsig. D. Fr. Aleixo de Menezes ... in the third Sunday after Pentecost at the 20th day of the month of June in the era of 1599. In the Church of all Saints, in the place and kingdom of Diamper. In Coimbra, 1606," by Dr. de Antonio de Gouveia. (It is bound in same volume with Journado do Arcebispo de Menezes, Coimbra, 1606.) See also Michael Geddes, The History of the Church of Malabar (1694, Eng. tr.); George M. Rae, The Syrian Church in India; J. D. D'Orsey, Portuguese Discoveries, Dependencies, and Missions in Asia and Africa.*

28 *Fr. Joao dos Santos, Ethiopia Oriental, vol. 2, part ii, book 4, chap. 19, p. 353.*

The Portuguese Catholic prelates not only introduced the Roman faith but displaced the Church of Malabar's Syriac version of the Bible with the Vulgate. [29] Geddes also attests that the St. Thomas Christians not only denied the dogma of transubstantiation and condemned the worship of "Images" but specifically denied the existence of "purgatory." [30] The Portuguese emissaries had charged that they must "answer for the souls that were now burning in Hell." [31] They stressed the Romanist dogma of "a Purgatory, and that the Souls which are cleansing from their Sins, do receive benefit from the Prayers and Devotions of the Faithful," and that "the Souls of the Just and Faithful, which at their departure out of this Life, have entirely satisfied for the Punishment due to the Sins that they have committed." They declared that the St. Thomas Christians denied the concept that "the Saints now reigning with Christ in heaven, are to be Reverenced, and Invoked." [32]

Geddes records the "persecution and violent methods of the Roman Prelates, to reduce them [the St. Thomas Christians] to the subjection of the Church of Rome," as well as recording the actions of the Synod of Diamper, in 1599, subscribed to by those who defected to Rome. Here a complete reversal took place on the part of those who went over to the Roman Church.

These new converts to the Catholic faith declared that they now "hold and confess" that "there is a Purgatory, and that the Souls which are cleansing from their Sins, do receive benefit from the Prayers and Devotions of the Faithful." They also affirmed that "the Souls of the Just ... do at the moment of their death go immediately into Heaven, where they behold God as he is." The reversal was complete.

28 *A Diocesan Synod of the Church and Bishopric of Angamale, pp. 133, 134, in Geddes, op. cit.*

29 *Geddes, History of the Church of Malabar, Dedication: A Diocesan Synod. Preface.*

30 *Geddes, History, p. 92.*

31 *A Diocesan Synod, pp. 110, 111, in Geddes.*

And further, Geddes states that they now "condemn, and anathematize the Heresy" of their former associates, who continue to hold that "the Damned are not Tormented" until they "enter into [such "torments"] after the day of Judgment."

They were also compelled to affirm that "the Saints now reigning with Christ in Heaven, are to be Reverenced, and Invoked, and that they offer Prayers to God for us." [33]

There could scarcely be a more revolutionary about-face.

The St. Thomas Christians and the Romanists were diametrically opposed in their concepts regarding the nature of man.

Such was another recorded conflict in the running battle of the centuries.

### 3. TAMPERING WITH THE RECORDS.

But that is not the whole story. Geddes, writing in 1694, adds that all available ecclesiastical records of this ancient church, found by the Inquisitors, were destroyed "in order that no pretended apostolic monuments may remain." [34] They likewise forced the alteration of the local copies of the Syrian Scriptures of the Thomists, to conform to the Latin version then in use by the Romanists. It is the familiar story of papal tampering. Wherever possible the Jesuits compelled their churches to submit to the Roman ceremonials. Since that time, however, from a segment of St. Thomas Christians; dwelling in the interior valuable early manuscripts were recovered in the language used by Christ and His apostles, who "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1.10). [35] Thus the original witness was preserved.

Thus from the category of their alleged "errors" it is obvious that the Catholic dogma of the inherent immortality of all souls had no place in the earlier Malabar theology which was derived from Early Church times.

*33 Ibid., p. 111.*

*34 Ibid.*

*35 Mills, Earlier Life-Truth Exponents, p. 4.*

[www.CreationismOnline.com](http://www.CreationismOnline.com)